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MARGINALISATION OF OLDER PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS AS A REFLECTION OF NEWS VALUES: THE CASE OF THE NEWSPAPER DELO

ABSTRACT

This study evaluates whether older people's problems are recognised as newsworthy by studying the level of attention they are given in a Slovenian daily newspaper. The data source was Slovenian newspaper articles on old age published in Delo between 2004 and 2018. Quantitative content analysis was used to evaluate the prevalence of older people's problems. The study found that 124 (or 10%) of all the articles sampled (N = 1243) on old age in the newspaper reported on older people's problems in Slovenia. The finding is discussed in relation to the news values theory and sociological scholarship on ageing. According to the results, older people's problems are less likely to be recognised as news by journalists and editors because they do not align fully with news values.

KEY WORDS: *media representation, social problems, old age, marginalisation, news values theory*

Marginalizacija problemov starih ljudi kot odsev novičarskih vrednot: primer časopisa Delo

IZVLEČEK

Članek ugotavlja, ali so problemi starih ljudi prepoznani kot vredni novinarskega zanimanja, in sicer s proučevanjem stopnje pozornosti, ki so je deležni v slovenskem dnevnem časopisu. Vir podatkov je slovenska raziskava časopisnih prispevkov o starosti, objavljenih v Delu v obdobju 2004–2018. Za oceno

razširjenosti družbenih problemov, s katerimi se soočajo stari ljudje, je bila uporabljena kvantitativna analiza vsebine. Raziskava je pokazala, da je 124 ali 10 odstotkov vseh pregledanih časopisnih prispevkov (N = 1243) o starosti poročalo o problemih starih ljudi v Sloveniji. Ugotovitev je obravnavana v povezavi s teorijo novičarskih vrednot in s sociološkimi spoznanji o staranju. Avtor prispevka ugotavlja da novinarji in uredniki probleme starih ljudi manj verjetno prepoznajo kot novico, ker se v celoti ne skladajo z novičarskimi vrednotami.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: medijske reprezentacije, družbeni problemi, starost, marginalizacija, teorija novičarskih vrednot

1 Introduction¹

Representatives of the Frankfurt School have identified the media as an important factor in the reproduction of modern societies, seeing them not only as a source of information and leisure activities, but also as agents of socialisation and mediators of political reality (Kellner 2004).

The media shape everyday relationships between individuals and society (Livingstone 2009: xi). They play an important role in society by constructing the world in a way that establishes social cohesion on the basis of shared experience and culturally conditioned behaviour (Kreačič 2004). Through the production and reproduction of certain content the media influence one's perception of the world (Fairclough 1995), values and attitudes (Laban and Poler Kovačič 2007). Although we have built up an accurate image of the world around us, only part of it is based on personal experience. Much of what we "know" about the world is based on agreeing with other people that a certain thing is "true". However, agreement about reality is strongly influenced by the images produced and reproduced about "reality" by the media² (Gorham 1999).

Media representations are a unique way of categorising and systematising reality, which pursue the goal of bringing order to the narrative of an article and thus making it meaningful. Often, this need for order and clarity (journalists are trained to write in a way that presents the content as clearly as possible) leads to oversimplification and narrowing of the narrative field, which usually reflects

1. This study builds in part on the author's PhD thesis "Representations of old age in Slovene daily newspapers" that was conducted under the framework of tasks (co-)financed from the state budget under contracts concluded between the ARRS and the author.
2. The media are considered as key institution in constructing the society's attitude toward marginalised social groups (Jalušič 2001). However, they are not the only institution offering a source of information about "reality". Family, educational institutions and other people with whom a person has contact, are important sources of information as well.

cultural and historical social practices. Media influence everyday interactions, including attitudes towards older people³, and shape perceptions of one's own old age. As Loos and Ivan (2018: 164) note, media representations reflect the logics by which images of old age, ageing and older people are produced and reproduced. In the production and reproduction of images of old age and ageing, journalists act as gatekeepers. News stories express opinions, beliefs and ideologies that are shaped, selected or reinforced by the political orientation of the newspaper and by both the editor's and the journalist's mental and cultural resources (Chen 2015).

The more attention the media give to an issue, the more important it will seem to people, but the reverse is also true: what the media do not talk about will seem less important to people. The latter can also be said for media representations of old age and ageing, since, as Milner et al. (2012) note, the mass media provide a critical platform for communicating the meanings and experiences of ageing across generations and play a key role in shaping the public agenda on old-age-related issues (Milner et al. 2012; Bergström and Edström 2022).

The present study of older people's problems as represented in the media is part of a wider research interest in newspaper reporting on social issues associated with marginalised people that has roots in Birmingham's cultural studies from the 1970s (Imran 2022). In Slovenia, there has been an increasing interest in exploring media representations of socially marginalized groups, such as migrants (e.g., Kralj 2008; Pajnik, 2007; Vezovnik 2018; Smrdelj 2021) and homosexuals (e.g., Kuhar 2003; Smrdelj et al. 2021). However, studies focusing on media portrayals of older adults in Slovenia remain limited (Gerdina 2022).

International research has demonstrated that older people are underrepresented in the media compared to their actual proportion within the population (e.g., Danowski and Robinson 2012; Edström 2018; Kessler et al. 2004). Makita et al. (2021) linked the underrepresentation of older people in the media to the fact that social groups that are less valued in society are absent or negatively represented in the media. Some authors further suggest that the absence of older people in the media can be seen as an indicator of their marginalisation (Nosowska et al. 2014; Vasil and Wass 1993). The latter is also in line with the hypothesis that the status of certain social groups in society can be evaluated through their presence or absence in the media (Harwood 2020; Ylänné 2020). The objective of this study was to evaluate whether older people's problems are recognised as newsworthy by studying the level of attention they receive in the

3. Unless otherwise stated, the term "older people" refers to people aged 65 and over, which is considered the retirement age in Slovenia and most of Europe.

Slovene daily newspaper, *Delo*. We set the following research questions:

- 1) What share of newspaper articles on old age, ageing and older people tackles older people's problems in the daily newspaper, *Delo*?
- 2) Does the relative attention given to older people's problems by the daily newspaper, *Delo*, compare to indirect indicators of the prevalence of older people's problems, such as the at-risk-of-poverty rate or the proportion of older people at risk of social exclusion in Slovenia?

The findings are then interrogated against the backdrop that the news value theory and sociology of ageing have to offer.

2 News values as determinants of newsworthiness

News values are intrinsic properties of (potential) news that contribute to making an event or topic newsworthy (Kepplinger 2008). These values emerged during the professionalization of journalism as a means to assist journalists and editors in determining the structure and prioritization of reporting (Bednarek and Caple 2014; Luthar 2004). News values are obtained through the socialisation of journalists (Joye, Heinrich and Wohlert 2016), which "involves their reliance on specific rules and formulas that help them to obtain not only accurate but also successful stories, and help them to identify which events or people can make news" (Gibb and Holroyd 1996: 152). The world views and mental representations of journalists therefore co-shape the production of news – most obviously in the judgement of which topics are worthy of publication.

One of the most influential theories for explaining the news selection process in communication sciences has been described by Galtung and Ruge in 1965 (Harcup and O'Neill 2001). To explain why certain events or stories receive more attention in the news media than others, Galtung and Ruge (1965) studied the structure of foreign news in Norwegian newspapers and composed a list of 12 news values that influence whether an event is more likely to be recognised as newsworthy (Harcup and O'Neill 2001). The first eight news values were based on the universal principles of human behaviour, and the last four were said to be culturally dependent and aimed at describing the press of Western nations (Galtung and Ruge 1965).

Since Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal study was published, many authors have empirically confirmed the source list of the 12 values (e.g. Joye 2010; Golan 2008), while others have revised and modified the original taxonomy (e.g. Gans 1979; Bell 1991), but most of them came up with very similar lists (see, for example, Harcup and O'Neill 2001). The *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication* points out that despite the proliferation of different lists of news values, most "overlap

with each other in terms of the aspects of newsworthiness they deal with and only differ in their labelling/naming practices" (Caple 2018: 10). While these studies point to the fact that no list of news values can ever be complete (Harcup and O'Neill 2017), they also strengthen the notion that news values are an inherent part of the news selection process in different countries, heterogenous settings and various media outlets (and presentations). Or, as Imran (2022: 56) puts it, "The significance of Galtung and Ruge's work remains momentous as their taxonomy continues to be reviewed, cited, scrutinized and criticized".

To provide an explanation for the level of attention that older people's problems receive in the Slovene daily newspaper *Delo*, the news values theory and sociological scholarship on old age and ageing will be consulted. Given the centrality of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) theory in communication research and the fact that it is still used in the 21st century, we used the original set of news values as described by Galtung and Ruge (1965: 65–71) as our explanatory framework. The 12 news values are described as follows:

1) Frequency

An event is more likely to be covered in the media if it occurs with the same frequency as the media than phenomena that last longer (e.g. social trends).

2) Threshold

To be considered at all, an event must reach a certain intensity. Among the events considered, those that are more likely to be newsworthy are those that are more likely to be influential or intense.

3) Unambiguity

The less ambiguous an event is or the fewer ways it can be interpreted, the more likely it is to become news. The more clearly the meaning of an event is understood, the more likely it is to be selected as news.

4) Meaningfulness

Events that are culturally closer to people (e.g. from countries with similar cultures) will have a higher chance of being selected for the news because they are more in line with the frame of reference of the news selector.

5) Consonance

The person who chooses the event that will become news may anticipate or even wish for something to happen, creating a mental pre-image of the event that increases the likelihood of it becoming news when it happens.

6) Unexpectedness

Among the events that are culturally familiar, those that are most unexpected and rare are likely to be selected as news. The reverse is also true. If certain problems are expected, they are less likely to be selected as news.

7) Continuity

Once an event hits the headlines, it remains in the media spotlight for some time – even when its profile has diminished – because it has become familiar and easier to interpret. Continuous coverage of the event also serves to justify the attention it has already received.

8) Compositional balance

It may be that an event is more likely to be recognised as news if it fits the overall composition or balance of the newspaper, rather than because of its own characteristics. For example, it may be that more complex stories will be balanced by more trivial ones or that a negative event may lead to the reporting of a positive event that would not in itself make news.

9) Elite nations

The actions of elite nations are seen as more influential than those of other nations, and the definition of elite depends on the cultural, political and economic context.

10) Elite people

The actions of elite and often famous people may be more important than others in the eyes of those who choose the news, and they may also expect readers to identify with them more readily.

11) Personification

In the news, rather than being the result of social forces, events are presented as the actions of people (preferably with names and surnames). This personification refers to cultural idealism, where humankind is the master of their own destiny and events are perceived as the result of acts of free will.

12) Negativity

Negative news is more likely to be seen as clear and coherent, more likely to be unexpected and more likely to unfold in a short time span.

Lists such as the one compiled by Galtung and Ruge (1965) facilitate the identification of the formal elements of news production but say little about other potential influences such as the impact of deadlines (Schultz 2007), commercial pressures (Caple and Bednardek 2015) and the economic, political and social context in which the media operate (Fowler 1991). However, they can be a valuable tool for studying wider sociocultural factors that are most often taken for granted, since news values tend to align with and reflect the sociocultural values prevalent in society (Makki 2019). Take the criterion of unexpectedness as an example. An event can only be unexpected in relation to the expected “normal” or “natural” course of life. Hall even suggests that “the vast majority of news stories report small, unexpected events in the expected continuity of social life

and institutions" (Hall 1972: 234). This implied expected continuity reinforces a sense of the naturalness and normality of the world in which we live and helps maintain the status quo: "What is known is not a set of neutral facts. It is a set of commonsense constructions and ideological interpretations of the world that binds society together at the level of everyday beliefs" (Hall 1972: 235). For example, if a journalist reports on a 70-year-old businessman and is surprised that he can still work at such an advanced age, the journalist is, on the one hand, implicitly communicating that septuagenarians are mostly incapable of working and, on the other hand, unwarily reinforcing the social convention of retirement based on chronological age (rather than, say, an individual's psychophysical abilities). In other words, journalists operate within the culture in which they live, which means that, in most cases, they rely on beliefs about old age and ageing that are shared by members of that culture to create content, even if they are not aware of it. There is no reason to believe that journalists are less prone to overlooking individual differences, making generalisations about old age and stereotyping older people than anyone else. Slovenian daily newspapers, for instance, reinforce the widely held idea that old age is a qualitatively different and distinct life stage, characterised by specific and intensive risks, treat older people as a homogeneous group separate from the rest of society, and subject them to age-based rather than individual judgements (Gerdina 2022). Therefore, an analysis of both the formal elements of news production and the sociocultural imaginaries of old age is required to explain the prevalence of older people's problems in the media.

3 Materials and methods

3.1 Selection of material for analysis

The data source for the analysis was newspaper articles on old age, ageing and older people published in *Delo*, the daily newspaper in Slovenia, in the period 2004–2018. *Delo* was chosen because of its high circulation and central role in shaping the media landscape in Slovenia (European Press Roundup 2023). We focused on the daily newspaper with news content because, unlike other media genres, news media are more likely to be perceived as a source of "real" information (Kovács et al. 2020). Furthermore, information that people perceive as "real" can be assumed to have a greater impact on their perception of the world, their actions and their relationships with other individuals and groups. Although newspaper circulation is declining sharply, news media are still relevant to study because their information is subsequently distributed through electronic and other communication channels or other media (Boomgarden and Vliegthart 2009; Bright 2016).

3.2 Justification of the time period

The chosen 15-year period for the analysis encompasses the years from Slovenia's accession to the EU in 2004 to 2018. Slovenia's accession to the EU was chosen as the starting point for the analysis, as the EU encourages Member States to open up and address demographic issues, which, in addition to migration and natality, include ageing and old age. The latter is supported by Mali and Hrovatič (2015), who note that the care of older people and old age in Slovenia has received special attention since the 2000s, when several social policy documents were adopted that plan and define the care of the older people. The increased attention to old age and ageing at the beginning of the 21st century is also reflected in the creation of the Anton Trstenjak Institute for Gerontology and Intergenerational Coexistence in 2004, co-founded by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia.

Due to the large number of newspaper issues during this period, the research was limited to five points in time within the selected interval. The election years 2004, 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2018 were chosen because old age and old-age-related issues can be expected to be higher on the political, and thus media, agenda due to the desire of political parties to win older people's votes (Stojanović, Prelević and Jovanović 2013).

3.3 Data collection

The articles for the analysis were retrieved using an internal electronic search of ČZP Delo's newspaper files. Two separate searches were carried out on the electronic database, looking for the presence of the keyword roots *star* (old) and *pokoј* (retire) anywhere in the texts that were part of the daily Monday to Saturday editions, excluding supplements, during the selected period. The advantage of this approach compared to selecting texts based only on keywords in headlines or descriptive indexes is that it also manages to locate articles that are infrequently present (Riff et al. 2014). The focus on daily editions was made because, in addition to the large number of articles that directly affect the social imaginary of old age, they also contain a large amount of news, and these are "understood as the most important media genre for agenda-setting" (Edström 2018: 84).

The sample (N = 1243) only included texts of journalistic articles with content of more than 50% on age, ageing or older people and excluded texts in the following categories: humour and anecdotes, black chronicles (e.g., crime reporting), artwork reviews, letters from readers, paid promotions, obituaries and non-textual material. The material was selected by the author with the help

of a qualified working group. Table 1 lists the number of texts that met the inclusion criterion and formed the final⁴ sample for the content analysis. The data are unique because the material was originally created without the researcher's influence and, in this sense, can be understood as independent (Bowen 2009).

Table 1: Number of included texts on old age and older people 2004–2018.

Number of contributions by year						
Magazine/Year	2004	2008	2011	2014	2018	Total
<i>Delo</i>	192	260	285	200	306	1243

4 Analysis procedure and results

In order to answer our research questions, we read the collected material (N = 1243) and, by means of quantitative content analysis, determined for each article whether it identified the main topic as a social problem. Quantitative content analysis was chosen because it provides insight into the social reality that can be inferred from the text (Neuendorf 2002). A social problem in this paper, following Jamrozik and Nocella (1998), is understood as a problem that the author of the paper identifies as something that:

- a) is undesirable, negative or threatening to important social values and interests or is perceived as threatening to society;
- b) concerns something of social origin (e.g. a social circumstance, process, arrangement or attitude); and
- c) is socially manageable and amenable to social control.

We further categorised the contributions that addressed social issues as follows:

- a) contributions that address older people's problems (e.g. poverty, social exclusion, poor access to services, mobility problems, inadequate housing, unregulated long-term care, etc.).
- b) contributions that address a social problem for which older people or an ageing population are considered responsible (e.g. unbalanced public finances, intergenerational conflict, labour shortages due to an ageing population, strain on the health system, etc.).

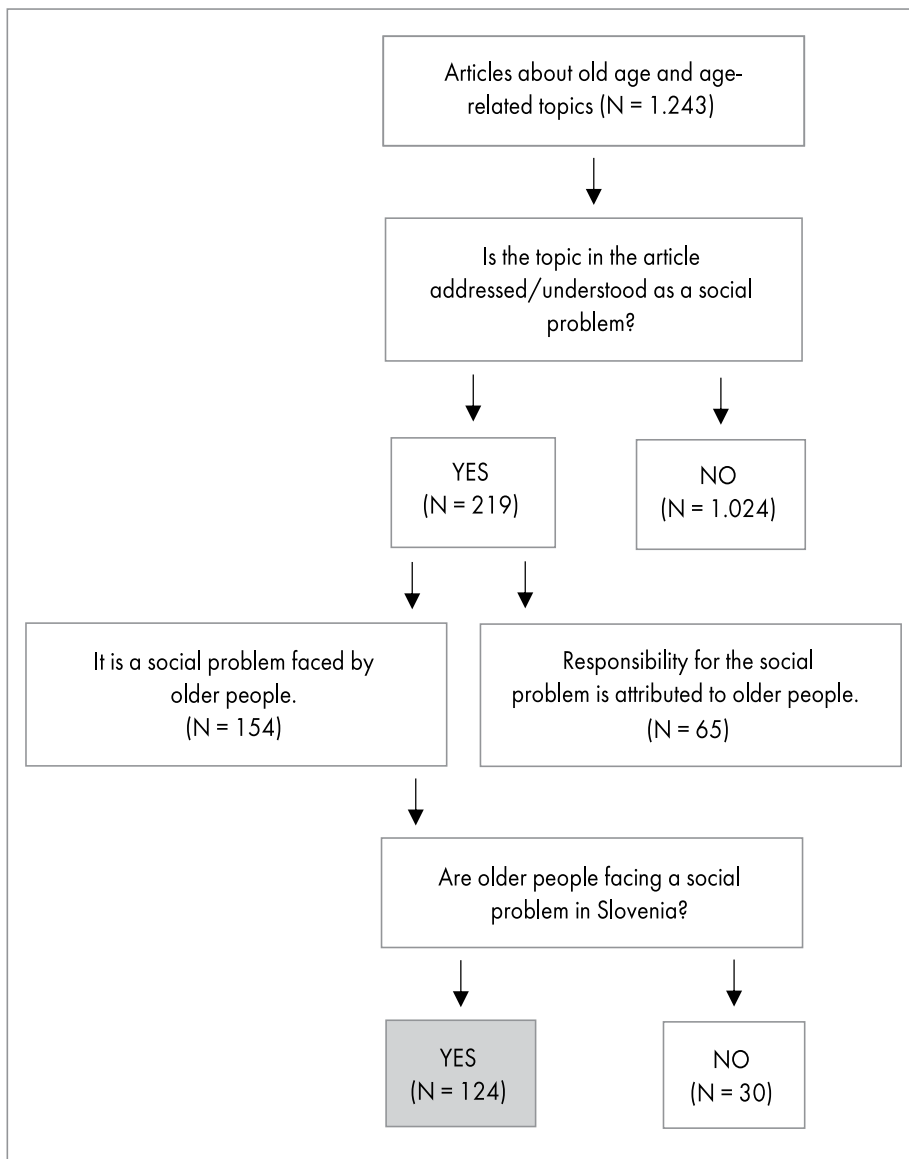
Only the contributions that addressed older people's problems in Slovenia were considered for analysis.

According to the news values theory, the more that older people's problems align with news values, the higher the share of articles about older people's

4. The database is available from the author.

problems is expected within newspaper reporting on old age, ageing and older people and vice versa. We found that 124 or 10% of all the sampled articles (N = 1243) on old age in the newspaper reported on older people’s problems in Slovenia (see Figure 1).

Image 1: Identification of older people’s problems.



Indirect indicators, such as the at-risk-of-poverty rate or the proportion of older people at risk of social exclusion, were higher during the period under review, which indicates a relatively low level of newspaper attention to older people's problems. For example, the proportion of people aged 65 and over living at risk of poverty was higher than the proportion of representations of older people's problems in the newspaper during the selected period of analysis. The proportion of people 65 years old or older in the population at risk of poverty was lowest in 2018, when it stood at 13.5% (SURS 2021). Over the selected period, more than 16% of people aged 65 and over were at risk of social exclusion, with the lowest proportion, also recorded in 2018 (ibid.). However, despite the fact that older people's problems are more widespread among the general Slovenian population than in the newspaper representations we cannot yet speak of the underrepresentation of these problems, as the amount of coverage does not necessarily coincide with the actual severity of the problems, as pointed out by the literature on agenda-setting (Kim et al. 2010). Instead, the low prevalence of older people's problems in the Slovene daily newspaper, *Delo*, may signal that older people's problems are marginalised because they do not reach the criterion of newsworthiness as set out by the news values theory.

5 Discussion

Our study found that older people's problems are marginalised in the Slovene daily newspaper, *Delo*. This is in line with Imran's (2022: 69) observation that journalists tend not to view older people as newsworthy. This can be explained by combining insights from the news value theory and scholarship on the sociology of ageing. The media shape the public agenda in the sense that they direct our attention to certain topics and areas and thus help shape our ideas and opinions on various issues (Weaver 2007). As we pointed out in the introduction, the attention the media give to certain events is the result of selective filtering – a process that determines what becomes news and what does not. Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified 12 factors that influence the likelihood that an event will be recognised as newsworthy by the journalists and editors, and subsequent researchers have applied their taxonomy and provided it with additional empirical support (Joye 2010; Golan 2008). Galtung and Ruge (1965) also claimed that the more factors a news story carries, the more newsworthy it seems and that a particular story can make up for lacking some factors by being particularly strong on others (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Part of the reason for the low level of coverage of older people's problems may be that these problems often fail to meet the criteria of almost half of the factors identified: frequency, unambiguity, meaningfulness, unexpectedness and elite people.

5.1 Frequency

Since the media (especially the daily media, which include newspapers) are more likely to report on a one-off event than on a long-term social trend, long-term problems and issues are less likely to be selected for news coverage. The frequency criterion eliminates many older people's problems, as these are distinctly the result of lifelong deprivations rather than one-off life events. It is social systems of resource allocation, institutions and human agency that crucially shape life course outcomes (Elman and O'Rand 2004; O'Rand 2003). For example, research has shown that health risks in later life are associated with family characteristics and intergenerational resource flows (O'Rand 2006). Specifically, childhood deprivation (O'Rand and Hamil-Luker 2005) is a risk factor for the development of health problems in adult life, and these further affect an individual's ability and opportunities in the labour market, with implications for both social status in old age and the speed with which age-related psychophysical processes unfold. The process by which disadvantages in one life stage and domain lead to disadvantages in later life and in other domains could be illustrated by many other examples. However, what has been said is sufficient to show that many problems in old age are not sudden (e.g. as in the case of personal bankruptcy) and that problems (e.g. health) drag on over a long period of time. This, in turn, means that such problems are less likely to receive attention in daily newspapers according to the news value theory.

5.2 Unambiguity

If clearly understandable events with unique interpretations are more likely to make the news, older people's problems, which are often multifaceted and complex, are less likely to make the news, according to this theory. In old age, problems in one area are more strongly intertwined with problems in other areas than in other periods of life. Take, for example, the problem of social exclusion in old age, which we have already shown to be widespread in Slovenia during the period under review. As Scharf and Keating (2012) note, the likelihood that people will experience multiple forms of exclusion increases above averagely with age. Research shows convincingly that the domains and dimensions of exclusion intersect (for a review, see Walsh et al. 2017). Exclusion from cultural activities can be related to exclusion from local services, from civic participation through access to information and social relations, from social relations through material resources, from access to basic services and from the neighbourhood (Van Regenmortel et al. 2016).

5.3 Meaningfulness

It should be pointed out that Galtung and Ruge (1965) only looked at news about foreign international high-profile events to determine which events become newsworthy. They found that events from countries with similar cultures were more likely to be selected for publication because they were more consistent with the frame of reference of the news selector. By analogy, if we apply the latter criterion to domestic reporting on different age groups, we can assume that content that is closer to the frame of reference or more in line with the culture and values of journalists or editors will have a higher chance of making the news. As older people are being othered in our society (see de Beauvoir 1996; Butler 2002), from the writer's point of view, they may be so far removed from their frame of reference that they already resemble the alien cultures mentioned by Galtung and Ruge (1965). Othering in old age is partly the fault of gerontology itself, which highlights and studies older people in contrast to the rest of humanity (Rozanova et al. 2006). Typical examples are Rose's (1962) theory of the subculture, which predicted that older people would separate from society, form their own community, develop a collective consciousness and form their own subculture, and Tornstam's (2017) theory of gerotranscendence, which argues that we should see old age as a period of life that is qualitatively different from life in middle age. Thus, if journalists and editors do not recognise themselves in older people and find the (sub)culture of older people alien, they are less likely to find older people's problems newsworthy.

5.4 Unexpectedness

In a society dominated by negative old-age stereotypes, many older people's problems can be accepted as normal and therefore uninteresting for media coverage. If poverty or health problems in old age are not considered unusual or rare or are taken for granted, then journalists can hardly be expected to write about them, let alone investigate their social causes. For example, if inaccurate old-age stereotypes lead journalists to perceive pain and suffering as a natural state of old age, they may be oblivious to the fact that many health problems faced by older people remain overlooked due to ageism in healthcare (Voss et al. 2018). For example, they are less likely to notice that older people are more likely than other age groups to be over- or under-medicated for pain, to be tested less frequently for sexually transmitted diseases or substance abuse or to be on organ transplant lists (Swift and Steen 2020).

5.5 Elite people

The elite position on the age ladder is occupied by middle-aged people, while young and older people are marginalised (Swift et al. 2018; Van Dyk 2016). This means that most older people, especially the fraction of older people who face a range of problems, are seen as less worthy of media attention than middle-aged people, as they are more likely to have negligible social power, low status and relatively little disposable wealth, respect and influence (Garstka et al. 2004). The exceptions are wealthy people who manage to live so well into old age, fulfilling the ideals of productivity, efficiency and independence that, despite their chronological age, old-age social status is not ascribed to them. Kovács et al. (2020) found that traditional stereotypes of influential older people still dominate Hungarian television news, and they are likely to appear together with topics related to power, control and knowledge (e.g. politics, migration, education, as well as their field of expertise). Their appearance is youthful, dominated by people of higher socioeconomic status (wearing more elegant clothes) and those in positions of responsibility and active production. Old age is accentuated in the case of the poor, the frail, the sick and the lonely older people, who are not members of the elite and are excluded from an increasing number of important social roles. Their problems are not attractive enough to make the news.

5.6 Methodological limitations and implications for future research

From a sociological point of view, the study of newspaper representations of older people's problems is of particular interest because it provides a powerful insight into the moral compass of society and its attitude towards old age and older people. However, these results should not be seen in isolation as evidence of the general public's attitude towards older people. They should be seen as supporting other research with a more direct illustration of attitudes towards older people that they face over time (e.g. public opinion surveys, interviews, etc.) (Koskinen et al. 2014). While beyond the scope of the present article, a qualitative content analysis of the identified material would in future allow for a more detailed account of what and whose particular problems in old age make the news and how the composition of such problems changes over time.

Furthermore, in this paper, we were interested in problems that are perceived as social problems by the journalists. Problems that were seen by the journalists as personal problems (linked to an individual's characteristics and behaviour) were excluded from the analysis, as a particular situation, event or incident must be identified as part of a social problem if it is to prompt demands for policymakers

to do something (Parsons 1995). While the sociological rationale for this exclusion is additionally theoretically grounded in Mills's work that emphasises that personal problems are socially less significant as they are seen as depoliticised and disconnected from wider social structures (Mills 2000), repeated reporting on these problems could lead to personal problems becoming social problems in the future. We nevertheless excluded personal problems from the analysis, as, based on theories of agenda-setting (e.g. Parsons 1995), they were not expected to have a high impact on the political agenda in the period under observation during this study.

Moreover, this study was concerned with published texts, which were the end product of a complex selection process influenced at least by social norms and cultural values, interest and political group pressures, professional routines (Tewksbury and Scheufele, 2009), as well as organization structure of the media institutions, availability of financial sources, editorial policies etc. (Poler Kovačič 2015). Future research will need to explore these influences in more detail, if it is to establish, the influence of various factors involved in the selection of news. Future studies could also conduct interviews with information sources, journalists, editors, newspaper owners and explore how their attitudes towards and beliefs about old age and older people's problems influence the news selection process.

In addition, this paper examined what was said at the level of text in a Slovene daily newspaper, *Delo*, excluding supplements. This gave us a deeper insight into the construction of older people's problems that dominate the news. Although news is the most important genre for setting the agenda (Edström 2018), constructions of age in interpretive genres are also important for the formation of social imaginaries of age and age identities. Future research could build on the results of this study by analysing representations of older people's problems in topical supplements and other media forms such as magazines, online social media or television.

Finally, although this article serves not only as a snapshot of the situation, but also as an archaeological report for future research on representations of older people's problems in a specific culture and at a specific historical time, its findings apply only to Slovenia. However, they will also resonate in other ageing societies whose researchers will be able to use them for comparison.

6 Conclusion

This study found that the problems of older people receive a relatively low level of newspaper coverage in the Slovene daily newspaper, *Delo*. The news values theory and insights from the sociology of ageing provided a useful lens through which to view and explore the marginalisation of older people's

problems in the daily newspaper. This article showed that the marginalisation of older people's problems can (at least in part) be attributed to the fact that older people's problems are often long-term, obscure, unfamiliar and expected and rarely relate to elite people, preventing them from being recognised as news by the newspaper journalists and editors.

The marginalisation of a particular social group in the media means that this group of people is less important in society (Nosowska et al. 2014). If you have no voice and are not part of the media agenda, you become more or less invisible in society (Bergström and Edström 2022). Relative inattention to older people's problems in *Delo* increases the likelihood that these problems will not be recognised as important in society. If older people's problems are not recognised as important, they also have little chance of being placed on the political agenda, where systemic solutions for them can be provided.

It is the media that provide access to social problems and have the power to construct individual problems as social problems (Kellner 2004). The marginalisation of older people's problems in the Slovene daily newspaper, *Delo*, means that older people are largely deprived of the strategies and messages that could help them understand and solve the problems they face. To avoid this outcome, this study recommends that the journalists and editors, reflect on whether older people's problems seem less newsworthy because they lack news values or are dependent on the fact that the journalists are not themselves old and therefore do not identify with issues that are characteristic of old age and ageing.

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